

Contemporary Developments in Cinema Exhibition

Stuart Hanson

Leicester Media School
Faculty of Technology

De Montfort University
Leicester

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ABSTRACT

The work offered here charts the history of cinema exhibition in Britain from the late 1950s to the present. At the start of this period, cinemagoing as a form of public entertainment entered a long period of decline that was only arrested with the development and growth of multiplex cinemas in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite these changes, the feature film itself remained a culturally and commercially valuable artefact, though increasingly this meant the Hollywood film. Whilst due consideration is afforded to the technological changes in cinemas and the cinema apparatus, my work places the development of cinemagoing in a broad social, economic, cultural and political context, and explains how these issues impact upon on-going developments.

In the late 1950s, cinemagoing declined partly in response to changing leisure habits, demographic shifts, the growth of consumer culture, television, and the widespread adoption of new broadcast technologies like home video and satellite. The multiplex returned feature films to cinemas, but was a definitively American commercial form closely associated with new forms of leisure and out-of-town retailing. There are also parallels between the context for development of the multiplex in the USA – suburbanisation, shopping malls and reliance on the motorcar – and developments in Britain in the last 30 years. To this end there is a specific emphasis on the development of the multiplex cinema as part of a wider narrative about the re-positioning of cinemagoing as a collective, public form of visual entertainment, in the period from the mid-1980s, in the context of some dramatic changes in the transient nature of capitalism and urban planning. From the early 1990s onwards there was a growing anxiety about the impact of out-of-town developments on Britain's urban centres, and a concomitant and renewed emphasis on the importance of the urban core rather than the edge. Thus, the key to understanding the evolution of cinema exhibition today is to pay particular attention to urban planning as inherently ideological, shifting and changing in line with broader political, economic and social considerations.

INTRODUCTION

This exposition and analysis for a PhD by Published Works draws upon a body of published work from 2000 up until 2013, which includes one monograph, two refereed articles and three book chapters. Together they constitute distinct and discrete contributions to knowledge in the field of cinema exhibition history and in particular the development of the multiplex cinema from its inception in 1985, when The Point opened in Milton Keynes, through contemporary developments linked to changes in exhibition technologies and the spatiality of cinema in the twenty-first century. Though focussed on Britain, the works make consistent reference to developments in the USA, particularly since the multiplex cinema originated there, but also to Europe as well.

The publications submitted are:

1. Hanson, S. (2000) 'Spoilt for Choice? Multiplexes in the 90s', in Robert Murphy (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s*, London: British Film Institute, pp.49-59 (4,710 words) reprinted in Murphy, R. (ed.) (2013) *British Cinema: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.
2. Hanson, S. (2007a) *From silent screen to multi-screen: A history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. (85,426 words)
3. Hanson, S. (2007b) "'Celluloid or Silicon?'" Digital Exhibition and the Future of Specialised Film Exhibition', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 4:2, pp.370-83. (5,914 words)
4. Hanson, S. (2013a) "A 'Glittering Landmark for a 21st Century Entertainment Centre': The Story of The Point Multiplex Cinema in Milton Keynes", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 33:2, pp.270-288. (8,350 words)
5. Hanson, S. (2013b) 'From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre: Multiplexes in Britain from the 1990s' in Albert Moran and Karina Aveyard (eds.) *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-Going, Exhibition and Reception*, Bristol: Intellect, pp. 245-259. (6,675 words)
6. Hanson, S. (2013c) 'De « Green field » à « Brown field » : le mouvement des multiplexes dans le centre urbain' in Laurent Creton and Kira Kitsopanidou (eds.) *Les salles de cinema en Europe: enjeux, défis et perspectives*, Paris: Armand Colin, pp. 98-112. (4,675 words)

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This exposition and analysis seeks to demonstrate achievement in relation to a range of key areas. In the first instance it will locate the publications *in* the context of the relevant literature and in doing so it will demonstrate knowledge *of* the relevant literature. As will be outlined, the literature on cinema exhibition in Britain concerned with the multiplex cinema in particular is a small field. Secondly, this exposition and analysis will identify the main issues discussed whilst also delineating the direction and thematic consistency of the published work. Thirdly, it will describe and assess the original contribution represented by the published work, before finally indicating a sustained research effort and contribution in a coherent field of research – cinema exhibition history.

Research methodologies within the body of work

In the published works presented I have adopted a range of methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, and have drawn upon a wide range of both primary and secondary sources, the latter of which has included academic work both historical (re-read in context) and contemporary.

When I wrote my first works – ‘Spoilt for Choice? Multiplexes in the 90s’ (Hanson, 2000) and *From silent screen to multi-screen: A history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896* (Hanson, 2007a) – the absence of a secondary academic sources necessitated the use of a range of quantitative statistical sources from trade journals such as *Screen International*, *Variety*, *Producer*, *Moving Pictures International*, *Screen Finance* and *Screen Digest*. Newspapers such as the *Financial Times* and the business and media sections of newspapers like the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Independent*, published frequent articles on developments in cinema production,

distribution and exhibition. In addition, Dodona, a research company based in Leicester, has often furnished me with data, albeit from older industry reports.

Much of the published work has drawn upon a range of qualitative interviews with those working in the exhibition industry. The opportunity to undertake these has arisen as a result of the establishment of a series of on-going relationships with key players in the market, including large national exhibitors (e.g. Odeon, Vue and Picturehouse), independent exhibitors (e.g. Phoenix Square in Leicester and the Regal Cinema in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire) trade bodies, (e.g. Cinema Exhibitors' Association), distributors, research companies (e.g. Dodona) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. the Independent Cinema Office, British Film Institute and the now defunct UK Film Council). The interviews were in many instances semi-structured, whilst others have been more unstructured and open-ended. In some cases, such as with those with staff at the now defunct UK Film Council and the Motion Picture Association of America, these took place in the context of preparation for funded research bids such as those to the AHRC (see below), but which were helpful in my research. In several other instances, such as those with national exhibition chains and independent cinemas (e.g. The Regal cinema in Melton Mowbray), these were part of research for particular publications and/or conference presentations. In the case of my work on the history of The Point multiplex, in Milton Keynes (see Hanson, 2013a), I interviewed the Chief Executive of Vue Cinemas, as he was then a junior manager at the site when it opened in 1985. Throughout my research I have returned to interview senior personnel in organisations like the Cinema Exhibitors' Association, whilst they have invariably been able to furnish me with

introductions to managers working in a range of companies and organisation, such as the General Manager of Odeon Cinemas.

In addition archival work has been important, especially when considering the development of multiplexes and other cinemas in particular localities. A notable example of this was the research undertaken on the history of The Point (Hanson, 2013a) in the official archive and image collection held at the Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

Finally, I have consistently drawn upon material from outside of film studies – reflecting the cross-disciplinarity of my work – such as urban studies, architectural history, retail management, local government and planning, political studies/political economy, economics and sociology. This has, for example, characterised my more recent work, including that on the resurgence of cinemas in town and cities across Britain (Hanson 2013b and 2013c).

Defining the multiplex

Sumner Redstone, who in 1954 had taken over from his father as head of US exhibitor National Amusements, which operates the Showcase multiplex chain, had both coined and trademarked the term “multiplex” by 1973. It was used to describe a new generation of purpose-built cinemas with multiple screen facilities, rather than encompassing all multi-screen cinemas, such as those traditional cinemas converted to three or four screens in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout the publications submitted I adopted a working definition that was a ‘new, purpose-built cinema of five or more screens’, though in reality the average

number of screens has tended to be greater. A report for MEDIA Salles (1994:48) stated that a minimum of eight screens was necessary for the multiplex effect to be ‘fully achieved’. In 1998, the General Assembly of the Union Internationale des Cinémas (UNIC), the federation of European exhibitors’ associations, decided unanimously that a cinema had to have eight screens or more to be called a multiplex.

1. LOCATING THE WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

When I wrote my first published work on the multiplex cinema, ‘Spoilt for Choice? Multiplexes in the 90s’ (Hanson, 2000) the field was sparse. Indeed, some fifteen years after the first multiplex opened there was little critical literature and no substantive academic texts detailing the development of the multiplex in Britain, whilst few texts brought the story of cinema-going in Britain up to the present. I had to utilise trade journals for articles and references. In many ways it was a story as yet uncharted. This was remarkable since the story of the multiplex in Britain, I sought to argue, was the story of the revitalisation of cinema-going.

By the time I came to write my monograph on the history of cinema exhibition in Britain, *From silent screen to multi-screen: A history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896* (Hanson, 2007a), there was still no book on multiplex developments in Britain (and there still is not). *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) was the first text to set out the history of cinema exhibition in Britain ‘from the first public film screening – the Lumière Brothers’ showing of their Cinématographe show at London’s Regent Street Polytechnic in February 1896 – through to the opening

of 30-screen ‘megaplexes’ such as Birmingham’s Star City’ (Hanson, 2007a:1). As an overarching history of cinema-going in Britain, *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) adopted a chronological structure, seeking to place the development of cinema in a broad social, economic, cultural and political context, and drew upon a wide range of both primary and secondary sources. Described by one reviewer as ‘a much-needed introduction to the history of cinemas and cinema-going in the UK’ (Velez-Serna, 2010:563) the only other study that could claim to consider a history of cinema-going that incorporated some discussion of the multiplex was Jancovich, Faire and Stubbings’ *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* published in 2003. This study echoed work that Jancovich and Faire had undertaken in a chapter in Stringer (ed.) (2003) entitled ‘The Best Place to See a Film: the blockbuster, the multiplex, and the contexts of consumption’. In *The Place of the Audience* Jancovich *et al* considered the consumption of film across various sites (cinemas) and contexts (television, video and satellite/cable). It differed greatly to *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) in that it was in large part a case study of the city of Nottingham. Stoddart’s (2003) article on ‘The Pleasures of the Multiplex’ was one of the few academic articles, whilst Eyles (2001) contributed a brief overview of cinema exhibition history in Murphy’s edited collection, *The British Cinema Book* (2001).

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) referenced a wide range of academic research relating to the more historical aspects of cinema-going in Britain, encompassing the first 40 years of cinema, notably Low’s (1971, 1973 and 1985) multi-volume history of British cinema, and the work contained in edited collections by: Fullerton (ed.) (1988); Higson (ed.) (2002); Richards (ed.) (1998);

Popple and Toulmin (eds.) (2000) and Williams (ed.) (1996). In addition there was the work of: Betts (1973); Burrows (2004); Chanan (1996); Dickinson and Street (1985); Doyle (2003); Hiley (1988, 1998 and 2002); Kuhn (1999); Murphy (1985); Richards (1973 and 1984); Rowson (1936); Sedgwick (2000) and Street (1997).

There was much empirical work on cinema attendance undertaken during the 1940s, including two studies undertaken for the Ministry of Information by Moss and Box (1943) and Box (1946) and a series of more sociological perspectives on contemporary cinema and cinema-going during the post-war period, with the most celebrated being Mayer's two studies (1948 and 1948), based largely on autobiographical accounts. Mayer's work offers an insight into the motivations of cinemagoers and the place of the cinema within social and cultural life. They also compliment the contemporary statistical surveys in that they offer an understanding of the ways in which the cinema appealed to certain ages and social classes. As part of the story of the multiplex, the work undertaken in the 1940s and 1950s helped me to see how the cinema audience began to fragment, as the conditions for the decline of cinema were established. However, the period that characterised the dramatic and accelerated decline in cinema-going – the 1950s onwards – was less well researched. What little academic writing that existed on exhibition was to be found in Harper and Porter (2003) and Geraghty (2000) and collections by Barr (ed.) (1986) and Curran and Porter (eds.) (1983). To some extent the absence of a sustained examination of cinema-going in the 1950s has been addressed in the intervening period by a recent AHRC project entitled *1970s British Cinema, Film and Video Art: Mainstream and Counter-Culture* led by Sue Harper, which utilised some attendance figures for cinemas in Portsmouth in

order to consider cinema taste. One of the outputs from this project was a study entitled *British Film Culture of the 1970s* (Harper and Smith, 2011).

There was, nonetheless, some detailed statistical work carried out on cinema-going in this period though what existed was largely concerned with the impact of television. Browning and Sorrell (1954), in a paper for the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, sought to consider the impact of television on cinema-going and the structure of the exhibition industry. This was followed by a range of more formalised, semi-official studies by the Political and Economic Planning Office (PEP) (1952 and 1958), Spraos (1962) and Kelly *et al* (1966). This range of research, undertaken from 1954 to 1966 took place during the period in which television was established as a popular visual medium not least with the arrival of commercial ITV in 1955, with all of these authors seemingly ambivalent about the effects of television on cinema-going. All study or at least address the relationship between TV licences issued, television transmissions and cinema admissions. These studies were useful in helping to interrogate the overly simple causal link made between television and a decline in cinema-going. However, as statistical surveys none of these studies, with the possible exception of Kelly *et al* (1966), were concerned with a broader consideration of the cultural importance or otherwise of cinema-going, though all recognised that cinema was declining as a popular medium. This broader consideration was what I set out to explain in *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) and in particular in trying to account for the development of the multiplex at the point of sustained contraction in cinema exhibition. With little academic work on the development of the multiplex cinema in Britain I had to develop an argument for why they were

established from the mid-1980s onwards. Part of this had been around the conditions of the exhibition industry both in the 1960s and 1970s and the period immediately prior to the building of The Point in Milton Keynes in 1985, Britain's first purpose-built multiplex cinema.

Much of the critical writing about cinema and its role within visual entertainment during the 1960s and 1970s was focussed on production and the films themselves, such as the work of Arnes (1978), Betts (1973), Durnat (1970), Jarvie (1970) and Walker (1974). There was little on cinema-going until Docherty, Morrison and Tracey (1987) undertook their major study in the mid-1980s, which had been presaged in a short discussion of their questionnaire data in an article in *Sight and Sound* (Docherty, Morrison and Tracey, 1986), and which influenced my work greatly. In many ways Docherty *et al's* study was an attempt to integrate past research with their own in an effort to refute a whole series of myths and half-truths about the decline of cinema. It was both a polemic directed toward those who would reduce the debate about the decline of cinema to technological determinism, especially the role of television, and a reaffirmation of the public's continued interest in the feature film via an analysis of an emerging video film culture, especially amongst those who professed to be regular cinemagoers. It was the only and therefore the most important, academic study of contemporary cinema-going at that time, though significantly, its data collection and analysis predated the building of the first multiplex.

The 1960s and 1970s are periods that have since been the focus for a range of studies, including Barber's (2011) study of attendance and film programming at

the Southampton Odeon cinema, and a current AHRC-funded research project entitled *Cultural Memory and British Cinema-Going of the 1960s*, directed by Melvyn Stokes, which is currently gathering a range of questionnaire data on peoples' personal memories of cinema-going during the decade (see Stokes and Jones, 2013).

From early on in the development of cinema there had been a tendency towards a concentration of ownership by big business concerns. In Britain two companies – ABC and Rank – effectively dominated exhibition from the post-war period through to the virtual collapse of cinema in 1984, when the number of cinemas in Britain stood at 660 – down from 1,492 in 1970 and more than 4,000 at the end of the Second World War. There was much literature on the development of cinema exhibition and ownership, including Macnab's (1994) study of J. Arthur Rank, Eyles' prolific studies of the major exhibition circuits (1993, 1996, 1998), and Murphy's (1985) and Richards' (1984) accounts of the inter-war period. Baillieu and Goodchild (2002) provided an overview of the business of cinema throughout the twentieth century, whilst there was a small but significant body of work on cinema architecture, including studies by Atwell (1981), Gray (1996), Heathcote (2001) and Sharp (1969).

Some of these texts cast a critical eye on developments immediately prior to 1985 (see Eyles' work), though one had to look elsewhere for an overview of the industry at its point of crisis. In this respect Blanchard's (1983) short but pithy study of the decline of exhibition managed to distil some complex themes around the relationship between television and cinema, and tourism and cinema into a

lucid and critical account. Similarly, Olins' (1985) polemical study of Britain's cinemas offered the reader a real sense of the state of the traditional exhibition sector on the eve of the multiplex. Higson (1986) had developed some of the themes explored by Blanchard in his analysis of *British Film Year*, designated in 1985, and offered a sense of the tension between a desire to reposition cinema as both a public medium to be used to articulate and circulate versions of the nation, and the countervailing dominance of Hollywood. Though not explicitly about multiplexes or any particular form of exhibition, Higson's article was important in highlighting the conditions of cinema and cinema-going immediately prior to the multiplex's arrival in the mid-1980s. These conditions were explicitly concerned with the articulation of market capitalism under successive Thatcher Conservative governments from 1979 onwards, which saw a tendency towards Britain's developing role in a rapidly globalising economy. This, I wanted to argue, was the critical moment for the development of a new form of cinema, based on the experiences of multi-national US cinema companies. One of the few authors to discuss this explicitly, though not in any great length, was Puttnam (1997). This would presage a series of themes that I have returned to in my most recent research publications – 'From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre: Multiplexes in Britain from the 1990s,' (Hanson, 2013b) and 'De « Green field » à « Brown field »: le mouvement des multiplexes dans le centre urbain ('From Greenfield to Brownfield: The Movement of the Multiplex into the Urban Centre', 2013c).

In *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) the focus of a large portion of the book was on the multiplex as a radical new kind of cinema: 'new in the sense of

being conceived and built within the last twenty years, and new in that they represent a radical divergence from the ways cinema-going has been seen within the social and cultural sphere' (Hanson, 2007a:4). Building on 'Spoilt for Choice?' (Hanson, 2000) consideration was given to the impact upon cinema admissions and cinema-going as a transformed leisure form. The latter would necessarily take into account the location, design and operation of the multiplex. Here again, there was a paucity of academic work considering these developments. Hornsey *et al* (1997) wrote a short and largely descriptive booklet on the development of the multiplex for the Mercia Film Society, whilst as outlined above, Eyles' series of books charting the history of the exhibition chains (1993, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2005) briefly mention their respective multiplex developments. In addition, Turner's studies of multiplex chains (1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 1999) were and are the only sustained histories of companies such as Showcase and Cannon. It is significant that there has as yet been no history of American Multi-Cinema (AMC), the company that "invented" and opened the first multiplex in the world in 1964 and Britain's first in 1985. The company's history and operations in Britain were examined in my article entitled 'A "Glittering Landmark for a 21st Century Entertainment Centre": The Story of The Point Multiplex Cinema in Milton Keynes' (Hanson, 2013a). Hubbard (2002 and 2003) was one of the first academics to undertake any sustained examination of the multiplex as a site of film spectatorship both spatially, in terms of the design and the consumption of place (see 2003), and geographically, in terms of their location away from the city centre (see 2002).

In *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) I argued that it was not possible to analyse the development of the multiplex cinema in Britain without recognising that the story was principally a US one, since this form of cinema was developed by AMC in Kansas in the mid-west in the early 1960s. Unlike the history of cinema exhibition, which had a metropolitan focus from its earliest days in the 1900s, the development of the multiplex took place in the context of the US suburb and the new malls springing up partly as a result of the 1956 Federal Highways Act. The work of Austin (1983) and Belton (1992) discussed the context for changes in the nature of US society in the post-war period, especially around the development of the suburb and the changing nature of the domestic sphere. Gomery's (1992) history of cinema-going in the USA details the development of the multiplex in the context of both changes in the nature of exhibition and the cultural and social changes that Austin described. Though Gomery's study provided *one* of the most coherent accounts of the development of multiplexes in the USA, the author perhaps most associated with the study of multi-screen cinemas in North America is Acland (whose work included 'Cinemagoing and the Rise of the Megaplex' (2000)) – primarily his book *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture* (2003). In addition, *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, edited by Hark (2002) has some contributions on multiplexes in the USA, including Paul (2002) and Edgerton (2002), which were drawn upon.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) developed some of the key arguments in 'Spoilt for Choice?' (Hanson, 2000) around the diversity in the kinds of films exhibited in Britain and the extent to which independent cinemas still played an important role in maintaining this diversity, whilst recognising that it

was (and still is) the Hollywood film, which maintains hegemony in cinema distribution and exhibition in Britain. Moreover, though at that time still a minority form in the totality of the cinema infrastructure, I argued that the multiplex exerted a disproportionate power in terms of box-office revenues and cinema admissions. The distribution and exhibition of films, and the selection offered by multiplexes reflected a pattern of domination by US multinational film companies that was actually restricting “choice”: the oft-trumpeted primary attraction of the multiplex. This is in large part, I have argued, because the decisions on which films to programme, made by the large multiplex chains’ central buyers, are based on a judgement as to whether they are able to play profitably for a month or more. Smith (2005) discussed both the impact of the multiplex in the context of developments in leisure and retailing, and film programming. Though published too late for consideration in *From silent screen to multi-screen*, Allison’s (2006) analysis of multiplex programming is a significant addition to the literature, coming as it does from a writer and historian who works as a cinema programmer for a large cinema chain.

Both *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) and ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) interrogated the extent to which the multiplex “experience” accounted for the year-on-year increase in overall cinema attendance, and how this increase was stratified according to age and geography. Due to the rapidity with which the multiplex sector was then growing (work on the book took place throughout 2004-6) obtaining statistical data on cinema attendance meant a greater reliance on the assortment of periodicals produced for the cinema industry. *Screen Digest* was a key source of statistical data and broad analysis of

cinema-going trends, whilst *Screen International* published periodic reviews of multiplex and other cinema developments. In addition, I relied on the annual *BFI Film and Television Handbooks*, which were a source of comment and data on the major trends in cinema production, cinema-going, television and video.

The Office of National Statistics collected data on cinema-going, based on a sample of cinemas, though these were not as reliable as those produced by the Cinema Advertisers Association (CAA), who collected data from all cinemas. The CAA produced detailed annual surveys entitled *Cinema and Video Industry Audience Research (CAVIAR)*, though the high cost of obtaining copies necessitated the use of summaries, or older editions available in the BFI library. In addition market research companies like Dodona also made available, in limited form, research on multiplex audiences. Data about multiplex developments in Europe as well as that for cinema attendances were collated and produced by MEDIA Salles, an Italian-based organisation charged with promoting cinema in Europe, and the European Union's Directorate of Culture and Audiovisual Policy. The connection between the growth of global media corporations and the multiplex in Britain was not discussed in many texts. I had to make these connections through an analysis of the patterns of media ownership. In this respect the work of Balio (1985, 1996 and 1998), Buckland (1998), Gomery (2005), Maltby (1998), Miller *et al* (eds.) (2005) and Moran (ed.) (1996) offered useful background material.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) ends with a consideration of new developments in digital cinema (d-cinema), particularly digital projection, and the future directions that cinema may take in Britain. At the time of writing, digital

and electronic film technologies were beginning to be adopted widely across the levels of film production, distribution and exhibition in Britain. It was a theme that I focussed on in a journal article entitled “‘Celluloid or Silicon?’ Digital Exhibition and the Future of Specialised Film Exhibition’ (Hanson, 2007b), which examined critically some of the arguments for the development of d-cinema as an alternative to the then current projection technologies based upon celluloid, and the opportunity this technology offered to diversify film programming and reduce the costs of distribution. “‘Celluloid or Silicon?’” (Hanson, 2007b) was one of the first articles to set out the arguments for d-cinema exhibition in the context of a series of initiatives to promote it as a way of delivering a broader range of films, especially those classified as “specialised”, to new audiences and suggested some potential problems and obstacles to its smooth implementation. At the forefront of these moves had been the UK Film Council that launched its Digital Screen Network in 2005.¹ At the time of publication there was little if any consideration of these new developments, with the exception of Culkin and Randle (2003) whose academic work was augmented by a range of articles on digital cinema developments for the *Guardian* newspaper. With such a dearth of relevant academic literature, much of the article was based upon extensive research in the trade press and a series of interviews with key personnel from the UK Film Council and managers of cinemas that were part of the network itself. More recently the literature has expanded with Street’s (2012) article bringing some of the developments up to date, whilst Barker’s (2012) study of alternative cinema

¹ Specialised film was defined for the purposes of the DSN as: foreign language with subtitles (in all cases); documentaries; archive/classic films. For films that did not fall into these categories, the UKFC applied other criteria, notably: those films that did not fall into what it calls ‘popular and recognizable genres’; those films in which the subject matter is considered ‘more complex and challenging’ and ‘less easy to communicate’; and films that ‘are often characterised as having a more innovative or unconventional storytelling style or aesthetic and may deviate from the straightforward narrative structure found in mainstream cinema’ (UKFC, 2006).

and live broadcasts (for which I was a proposal reader for the publisher) details many of the most recent technical and cultural developments.

My most recent publications have dealt with the multiplex cinema, with ‘A “Glittering Landmark for a 21st Century Entertainment Centre”: The Story of The Point Multiplex Cinema in Milton Keynes’ (Hanson, 2013a) an attempt at the definitive history of the development of the first multiplex cinema to be opened in Britain. This article originated in an invited paper entitled ‘The Point: Birth of the Multiplex in Great Britain’, given at the *International Workshop in Comparative Cinema History: Film Exhibition in Europe*, Universiteit Utrecht in 2010. It was and remains the only history of this important cinema to date and was based upon substantial primary research in the official archive and image collection held at the Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

Though the development of The Point set the model for the out-of-town multiplex developments that characterised the following ten to fifteen years, my two latest publications have addressed the movement of multiplexes back into town/city centres. In ‘From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre: Multiplexes in Britain from the 1990s’, (Hanson, 2013b) I have suggested that though the development of the multiplex first marked a break in this relationship with the city centre, it has been re-established in the first years of the twenty-first century. The impetus for this is a complex interplay between urban planning, the market, and the resurgence of the urban centre as the focus for leisure, especially the so-called “night-time economy”. ‘From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre’ (Hanson, 2013b) considers Britain generally and more specifically via

reference to the city of Leicester. In *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) I argued that the origins of the multiplex lay at least in part in the relaxed planning rules integral in the Thatcher Conservative government's suite of policies designed to regenerate post-industrial Britain. Though few authors had explicitly dealt with multiplexes and planning (an exception was Pal and Jones, 1996), the range of reading on planning more generally was important in informing and refining my hypothesis (see: Thornley, 1993; Harvey, 1996; Fernie, 1995; Davies, 1994, and Ward, 1994).

The impetus for 'From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre' (Hanson, 2013b) was the shift in official planning policy under Tony Blair's New Labour government from 1997 onwards and in particular the commitment to "sustainability" and the redevelopment of urban centres. The chapter drew on a range of planning literature, particularly around developments in retailing, such as Griffiths (2010), Jones and Hillier (2000) and Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2003). There was a smaller range of studies which dealt explicitly with cinemas, including those by Collins, Hand and Ryder (2005) and Ennis-Reynolds (2002) the latter of which, though more than ten years old now, offers the most interesting analysis of the ways in which discourses of sustainability have led to shifts in leisure patterns. In its focus on Leicester as a case study, 'From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre' (Hanson, 2013b) utilised a range of primary source material, particularly that generated by the city council in terms of promotional material.

‘De « Green field » à « Brown field »: le mouvement des multiplexes dans le centre urbain’ (‘From Greenfield to Brownfield: The Movement of the Multiplex into the Urban Centre’) (Hanson, 2013c) dealt with several of the same issues found in ‘From’, though it differed in that it focused largely on Leicester’s cinema infrastructure as a more sustained case study. In terms of analysis of cinema-going in Leicester the only academic study thus far as has been undertaken by Hubbard (2004), and in particular his qualitative survey of cinemagoers which I referenced in this and ‘From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre’ (Hanson, 2013b).

2. THE MAIN PROBLEMS OR ISSUES UNDER DISCUSSION AND THEMATIC CONSISTENCY OF THE PUBLICATIONS

The mid-1980s are the crucial period for much of my research as it marked a significant transformation in the fortunes of cinema-going in Britain. In 1984 the figures for cinema attendance stood at 54 million admissions per year, which was to be the nadir. In 1946 there were 1.6 billion admissions as over three-quarters of the population attended the cinema at least once a year, and one-third once a week or more. By 1984, the situation had reversed itself, as 74 per cent of the adult population did not attend the cinema at all. A key issue, therefore, was *why* the first multiplex cinema opened just a year later in 1985 and whether this new form of cinema precipitated an annual increase in both attendances and screens thereafter. I concluded that one must analyse not only *how* multiplex cinemas developed but also *why* the mid-eighties came to be a significant starting point. In order to address these questions I concluded that any account would need to pay

attention to the broader social, economic, cultural and political context, and all of my work has consistently sought to do this.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) follows a chronological path from the early beginnings of cinema, through the heyday of cinema-going in the 1940s and its steady decline until the 1980s, to its turnaround in fortunes and year-on-year increase in admissions. I have argued that the decline in the numbers of cinemas in the second half of the twentieth century was a result of the exhibition industry's focus on the *mechanics* of exhibition and distribution, rather than on the social and cultural *experience* of film and cinema-going. One can see this in the way in which exhibitors reacted to the perceived threat of television, by seeking to reassert cinema's technological superiority in the presentation of moving images – installing Cinerama or CinemaScope for instance – whilst at the same time neglecting the fabric of many of their buildings and closing local cinemas. During the first 60 years of the cinema the material comforts of the auditorium were a considerable attraction to the working-class inhabitants of generally poor housing; however by the 1950s for many the comforts of the home were such that they proved superior to the local “flea-pit”. The issue was not the technological superiority of cinema or television but a more prosaic argument about whether a *public* form of entertainment (cinema) was being superseded in large part by a *private* form of entertainment (television). What the cinema industry failed to recognise was that much of their audience had moved away – literally and figuratively. It was the US exhibition industry that recognised that the mode of consumption of the film had shifted decisively under contemporary capitalism into a commodity that had its emphasis in home-based technological forms of

entertainment. Film viewing, as a popular cultural activity was very much alive: it was cinema-going that was not.

I have sought to address the problem of how far the decline and resurgence of cinema was seen in relation to demographic changes in Britain's population in the post-war period and throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The people who visited the cinema most often were the young working-class, who lived in established urban centres. It would be this very group and these very areas that would see the greatest demographic, social and environmental upheavals in the twenty years after the Second World War, as Britain's towns and cities were redeveloped and the population dispersed accordingly. If cinema was to continue to be important for its audience exhibitors should have responded flexibly to these demographic and cultural shifts. However, this was not the case as cinemas did not follow populations out of the cities, save for isolated examples such as in the new towns of Harlow and Hemel Hempstead where Rank opened its first new cinemas since before the Second World War, and they were more generally unable to adapt to the changing spatial urban context for leisure consumption (see Osborn and Whittick, 1977). In Basildon, one of the first new towns designated in 1949, the first cinema (an ABC) was not opened until 1971. Exhibitors focussed on television as the dominant threat to the detriment of other factors, such as the so-called "nuclear family" and their commitment to their new homes. As the exhibition industry shrank the two dominant companies – ABC (purchased by EMI in 1969 which became Thorn-EMI in 1979) and Rank – effectively dominated British exhibition.

A key issue, therefore, was accounting for the lack of investment in new cinemas by the Rank/Thorn-EMI “duopoly” and the extent to which this provided encouragement for new overseas multiplex owners, notably from the USA. From the 1960s onwards this duopoly introduced the concept of multi-screen cinema via the dividing and sub-dividing of its existing sites. Between 1970 and 1980 the number of cinema buildings fell although the number of screens remained fairly constant. Taking as my starting point Olins’ (1985) analysis that as part of large conglomerates with interests in a variety of other fields, the duopoly had neglected their cinema businesses, the key seemed to be the enduring attraction of film and the demand for a different kind of cinema. The mid-1980s was a period in which the articulation of nation was aligned with the prime discourse of “Thatcherism”: that of the market. When AMC opened Britain’s first multiplex, they did so for good reasons, which were not simply concerned with re-establishing cinema as an important cultural form and commodity. They saw that Britain was a sound commercial opportunity and one in which the hegemony of Hollywood had been established, even if cinemas had been consistently closing.

I further contend that the development of the multiplex in Britain was a direct result of the steady development of vertical integration in the industry and in particular the dominance of the major Hollywood corporations. Britain was appealing to US companies because of its steadily relaxed regulatory structure around vertical integration. In addition to AMC, the first major US cinema exhibitors to expand overseas were National Amusements (who use the Showcase brand for their cinemas and whose owners control both CBS and Viacom), Warner Bros. and Cinema International Corporation (a forerunner of United

Cinemas International - UCI), which was a joint venture between Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures and United Artists Entertainment. All sought to re-establish abroad the vertically integrated structures they had once enjoyed in the USA, with large organisations controlling the production, distribution and exhibition of film.

In the USA, the development of the multiplex from the 1960s was inextricably linked to the importance of the suburban, out-of-town shopping centre (or mall), which was the main focus for these cinema developments, and subsequent building design. In Britain, correspondingly the development of the multiplex would take place not in the urban centre but in out-of-town shopping and leisure complexes around many major conurbations, the demand for which was related to the steady increase in car ownership throughout the 1980s and the move by many people to housing developments on the urban fringe. My early research sought to identity the extent of the development of new kinds of leisure-based industries and the relative importance of cinema within them. The emergence of a new kind of out-of-town leisure and shopping culture in the 1980s and 1990s was both a result of the economic and political discourses of neo-liberalism, and indicative of a new set of aesthetics around shopping and consumerism. To this end I have considered the location, design and operation of the multiplex cinema, situating my analysis in the context of urban planning and in particular the easing of planning restrictions in the 1980s and early 1990s, with the concomitant development of large out-of-town shopping centres (see also Hanson 2013a).

In my work since the publication of ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) and *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) I have charted a growing sense of unease about the impact of out-of-town leisure on the city centre and the introduction of more restrictive planning guidelines intended to rejuvenate Britain’s neglected urban spaces (see Hanson 2013b and 2013c). Specifically, these began under John Major’s Conservative government and its introduction of planning restrictions designed to halt the out-of-town shopping centre. These were outlined in a series of Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) between 1993 and 1997 including *PPG6 Town Centres and Retail Developments* in June 1996, which was the first to make special mention of multi-screen cinemas. The shift in emphasis from the periphery to the centre was one of the cornerstones of Tony Blair’s Labour government from 1997, which called for “sustainable development” and the regeneration of Britain’s towns and cities. This saw a variety of strategies, two of which – the designation of cultural zones or quarters and the identification of areas for redevelopment as shopping centres – were particularly common (see Hanson, 2013b and 2013c). In both the cinema would be seen as an important element in attracting people back to the city centre.

A major development that has taken place in cinema exhibition since the completion of *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) has been that of digital cinema (d-cinema). In the final chapter of that book I made very limited reference to the newly emerging technology of digital projection and the efforts by organisations like the UK Film Council to help embed it via its Digital Screen Network. It was clear that this was an area of technological development that would have serious implications for both film exhibition and distribution, and

thus formed the basis of a more sustained examination of developments in “Celluloid or Silicon?” (Hanson, 2007b). By the mid-2000s the development of d-cinema as an alternative to current analogue projection technologies based upon celluloid, was well underway. “Celluloid or Silicon?” sought to consider the potential problems and obstacles for d-cinema exhibition in the context of a series of initiatives to promote it as a way of delivering a broader range of films to new audiences. This meant engaging once again with the structure of contemporary exhibition industry and in particular the distributor/exhibitor relationship, along with new ways of marketing films that have run in tandem with developments in the cinema. In addition, the digitalisation of film exhibition has been expressed through the development of 3D and “alternative content” (e.g. opera, ballet, West End theatre productions, sport and rock concerts) now more popularly called “Event Cinema”. This influenced my work that followed both in terms of published research but more importantly in terms of its potential for AHRC research funding (see below).

3. THE ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION REPRESENTED BY THE PUBLICATIONS SUBMITTED

Though the publications submitted have spanned the whole history of the public exhibition of films in Britain since 1896, the significant contribution represented by my work has been concerned with a closer focus on the history of the multiplex cinema. Though the primary attention has been on Britain an account of developments in the USA, where the multiplex originated, informs this history.

3.1 The context for the decline of cinema

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) was one of the first and the only chronological accounts of the history of cinema-going in the United Kingdom - from fairground attractions in the late 1800s to the future of cinema in the digital age. It explored film exhibition and cinema-going in their wider contexts, investigating factors beyond the rise of television in the 1950s and the development of multiplexes in the 1980s. Chapman (2009:131) observed in a review that *From silent screen to multi-screen* was ‘a valuable survey, the first comprehensive study of its kind for Britain’. Barber (2011:77) commented that ‘Hanson’s 2007 work *From silent screen to multi-screen* provides a much needed intervention in the field of British exhibition practices’. Though much of the early history of the cinema (prior to the 1930s) was drawn necessarily from secondary sources, the bulk of the book and especially the period from the 1950s, encompassing the decline of cinema-going as a public entertainment through to the development of the multiplex cinema onwards, utilised a considerable amount of primary source data. McKernan (2007), a respected film scholar and archivist at the British Library, recommended the book, observing that it offered an original contribution:

[i]t is a huge subject, and Hanson has evidently read very widely and absorbed and explained a great diversity of material. It is a very useful text, aimed squarely at the academic market, and as said there are too few titles on cinema audience studies still (it is a growing subject) not to call this book a welcome addition to the field. There is really isn’t anything quite like it which covers the whole range of British film exhibition.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) sought to place the development of cinema in a broad social, economic, cultural and political context. As Allison (2009), commented, the book's 'wide-ranging account concerns itself as much with audience habits and preferences as with cinema architecture, technology and business strategy'. To this end a key contribution to knowledge is the critical examination of a range of socio-cultural processes that contributed to the decline of cinema. Significant amongst these socio-cultural processes was the demographic change amongst Britain's traditional cinema audience: the urban working-class. This decline in audience is discussed in the context of both a transformation in the make-up of post-war society, in terms of class and geography, and the development of television. *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) interrogates the widely perceived causal relationship between the growth of television and the decline of cinema-going, highlighting the ways in which this was open to challenge. Several reviewers drew attention to this aspect of the book including Allison (2009) who observed that:

[i]n *From silent screen to multi-screen* it was important to interrogate the oft posited notion that there as a simple casual relationship between the decline of cinema-going and the development of television. For example, in the sections of the book that deal with the impact of the widespread acquisition of domestic television sets upon cinemagoing habits his scrupulous consideration of a complex range of causes and effects is impressive. Avoiding the all too common pitfall of propounding an overly reductive correlation between the growth in television ownership and the simultaneous decline in movie-going, Hanson draws upon some aptly selected studies and statistics, weighing up the sometimes conflicting theories of earlier cinema historians in order to show that, while a causal relationship undoubtedly existed, other significant factors were at play.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) charts the decline of cinema-going as a social entertainment in the 1960s and 1970s and considers it in relation to a shifting population and town planning, allied to changes in the nature of the family. The accounts of the decline in cinema-going in the 1950s and 1960s are often attributed solely to television and indeed this discourse was one that the cinema industry was only too prepared to promulgate. However, if one considers the extent to which the cinema's most enthusiastic audience, the urban working-class, experienced the most significant decline in attendance; then one is left to conclude that it was the changing environment for working-class communities that was significant. In London in 1949 twenty per cent of homes were officially classed as slums, whilst by 1951 eight million homes in Britain were declared unfit for habitation (see Grinrod, 2013). Thus, I suggest that it was the movement of working-class communities out of the city, usually as part of slum clearance programmes, to new suburbs and towns on the periphery of the conurbation, which played a significant part in the decline of cinema-going. In most of these areas there were no cinemas. Thus, the catalysts for these changes were *The New Towns Act, 1946* and the *Town and Country Planning Act*. In many of these new areas planners made no provision for cinemas and cinema chains were less inclined to invest in new cinemas. Several reviewers drew attention to this aspect of the research, including Velez-Serna (2010: 564-5), who observed that:

the best moments of the book are when Hanson considers how social transformations, such as the increased primacy of the nuclear family and the ownership of domestic appliances, created new patterns of leisure that affected the film industry...There are some clearly interconnecting topics that recur in each chapter: official intervention (in the form of censorship, licensing, or economic stimuli, depending on the shifting moral standing of the cinema); the

class composition of the audience and the changing patterns of middle- and working-class leisure; the development of audience research methods; and the effect of urban planning policies on cinema building.

3.2 The development of multiplex cinema

My work on charting the development of multiplex cinema and its place in the history of cinema going – including its beginnings in the USA in the 1960s through to its introduction in Britain in 1985 – is a highly original contribution to knowledge. Indeed, I am now widely regarded as one of a small group of academics at the forefront of international research, with particular and distinctive knowledge and expertise in this area. I am part of a network of academics from across Europe, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France, with an interest in cinema exhibition. ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) was one of the first published academic works to consider the multiplex in Britain, with much of the research into the development of the multiplex undertaken at a time when there was little if any academic interest in the subject. In it I argued that the key to the story of the multiplex in Britain were the ways in which this form of leisure had diverged from traditional notions of cinema, whilst at the same time capitalising on the undoubted attractions of the public exhibition of feature films. The divergence had been around the *nature* of the cinema-going experience: what we had come to expect from leisure industries. I sought to consider the multiplex within the context of the complex relationship between US economic and cultural power, and the cinema in Britain. This had been part of an effort to theorise *how* this cultural domination actually manifested itself. Therefore, we might consider the *process* through which US popular cultural forms and practices had come to be so pre-eminent. In particular, my argument was

that there existed a “myth of choice” in which a small proportion of major Hollywood studio films received a disproportionate amount of resources in terms of marketing and screen time at these new multiplexes, whilst non-Hollywood films found it difficult to find screen time. The scarcity of outlets for non-Hollywood films is exacerbated by the tendency for multiplexes to hold over some films for successive weeks.

One of the main contributions to knowledge of ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) was a consideration of this process utilising Ritzer’s (1996 and 1998) work around rational systems in the fast-food industries, which he termed ‘McDonaldization’. Ritzer’s argument was that the fast-food restaurant and McDonalds in particular, served as an example of a new form of consumption that recast the relationship between purchaser and provider. The fast-food restaurant symbolised a new form of business practice and ethos that could be applied in a variety of other commercial settings, including I argued, multiplex cinemas. Moreover, Ritzer’s work, based on Weber’s theory of ‘rationalization’, allowed for the linkages between it and the discourses of cultural imperialism, since McDonaldization was (and remains) the optimum form of capitalist organisation and one that sees US cultural and business models predominate over other forms. ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) has been referenced by several authors associated with writing on cinema exhibition including Acland (2003), Grainge (2008), Harbord (2002), Jancovich and Faire (2003), Lay (2002) and Smith (2005). It has been recently included in Murphy’s 2013 four-volume edited collection *British Cinema*, part of Routledge’s *Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* series. In his article on film programming at the multiplex McDonald

(2010:267) engages directly in a dialogue with my arguments around the “myth of choice”, acknowledging the dominance of Hollywood films, but arguing instead for recognition that multiplex programming is ‘structuring choice...but in ways which are highly circumscribed and organised’.

3.3 The place of the multiplex: siting and planning

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) built on the work undertaken in ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) and looked at the development of the multiplex in the USA from the 1960s, and examined the importance of the shopping mall and the suburb as the main focus for these cinema developments. It argued that with the hegemony of the Hollywood film more or less complete in Britain by the mid-1980s, US exhibition companies increasingly reasoned that audiences would be attracted to US-style multi-screen cinemas. The key consideration and the next original contribution to knowledge, was to address the questions of *why* at this point, which would be the nadir of cinema-going as a public entertainment, was a) the first multiplex cinema built in 1985 and b) whether the downward spiral of cinema attendance was reversed *as a result of* the introduction of the multiplex cinema. Of significance here is the fact that the subsequent development of the multiplex has run in tandem with a year-on-year increase in cinema admissions. My research suggested that the key to understanding the mid-1980s was the architectural and cultural aspect of multiplex developments, especially in relation to prevalent policies of urban planning. This was best expressed in the discussion of urban regeneration and the role multiplexes came to play in the leisure-based economy in a post-industrial context. Key to my argument was the development of out-of-town shopping and

the important place of the multiplex in these new initiatives, in turn a consequence of the laissez-faire, economic policies of successive Conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher throughout the 1980s.

As significant as the new planning legislation in the post-war period was on cinema-going and its contraction, so was the range of planning and economic legislation in the 1980s on its resurgence, albeit at the continued expense of other forms of cinema. So, the rather dry sounding *Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980* was a significant primer for multiplex development in that it covered the setting up of Urban Development Corporations and Enterprise Zones, which sought to speed up the planning process and create a relaxed regulatory environment. Coupled with the “shaking out” of traditional industries, the emphasis was increasingly placed on the rapid development of out-of-town shopping and leisure complexes across Britain, often on old industrial sites, including Meadowhall near Sheffield, Merry Hill in the West Midlands, Lakeside in West Thurrock on the outskirts of Greater London and Metrocentre near Gateshead/Newcastle. These were to act as primers for the regeneration of regional economies and were in part predicated on increased ownership of motorcars and, crucially, the role of the private capital. These shopping and leisure complexes were the location for the first round of multiplex developments and set the template for many years to come.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) set out to chart the story of multiplex developments and especially the complex relationship between exhibitor and developer, and exhibitor and distributor; done with the aid of

considerable primary research of materials from Britain, USA and Europe, especially trade papers, financial and company data, local and national planning legislation, and industry and government reports. In several instances case studies of particular developments (e.g. Thorn-EMI's multiplex at Salford Quays, CIC's complex in High Wycombe and especially Birmingham's Star City) were used to illuminate key issues. In much of my work the building of The Point in Milton Keynes in 1985 was perhaps the most significant multiplex and a harbinger of future developments.

All of the publications submitted have to a greater or lesser extent sought to trace the development of waves of multiplex building since 1985 and set these in the context of changes in both planning legislation and the economic cycle. Between 1985 and 2013 there has been a year-on-year increase both in the number of cinema screens and multiplexes, though the total number of cinemas has fluctuated. However, the opening of new multiplexes has not been one of uniform growth, rather it has been subject to periods of excited, almost fevered development, when the number of openings averaged more than one a month. Between 1988 and 1991, for instance, 45 multiplexes opened, whilst the period between 1994 and 1998 saw 89 openings. After 2000 the rate of openings slowed down somewhat, whilst several of the first generation of multiplexes (e.g. Britain's second multiplex in Salford Quays) began to close. What seemed clear from analysis of the data was the extent to which the focus of cultural and economic policy shifted from the periphery to the urban centre, which influenced planning legislation subsequently (see 3.8 below).

3.4 The multiplex: architecture and design

Consideration of the architectural development and design of the new multiplex is the next contribution to knowledge and was considered first in ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) in relation to Ritzer’s (1996 and 1998) conception of ‘McDonaldization’ (see above) and its articulation through the four principles of ‘efficiency’, ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’ and ‘control’. This utilisation of ‘McDonaldization’ enabled an understanding of the ways in which the design of the multiplex was an expression of functionalism, in the design and layout of the auditoria, for instance. Furthermore, it argued that for many people the multiplex offered a similar environment to many others they had begun to spend time in, such as shopping centres, leisure centres, bowling alleys and, of course, fast-food restaurants.

A more sustained, historical consideration of cinema design was undertaken subsequently in *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a). Here the emphasis was on the evolution of the cinema from its origins in the fairgrounds and converted halls of the late nineteenth century, through the first purpose-built cinemas in the wake of *The Cinematograph Act 1909*, the “super cinemas” of the 1930s, the sub-division of cinemas in the 1960s and 1970s, and through to the multiplexes of the 1980s and after. Implicit in this history of cinema architecture, particularly from the 1930s onwards, has been the ways in which it reflected both modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, with the cinemas of Oscar Deutsch’s Odeon chain expressing the modernist principles of the age and The Point’s Mesopotamian Ziggurat or Star City’s “fairground at night” examples of postmodernist pastiche. Moreover, the new multiplex designs involved some

attempt to re-establish an identity for the cinema, in which the functional design of the malls was replaced by a more playful and postmodernist aesthetic which plagiarised many of the features of the older “picture palaces”. I have argued strongly that the decline of cinema, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s when cinema chains embarked on the “twinning” and “tripling” of their screens, and the resurgence of cinema brought about in large part by the development of the multiplex, could be accounted for via a consideration of architectural design and the principles of multi-screen cinemas.

From silent screen to multi-screen (Hanson, 2007a) examined the symbiotic relationship between the multiplex and the shopping mall, developed first in the USA but which was important in the diffusion of these new cinemas in Britain. In part this recognised that the multiplex’s design features had come to connote pleasure and importantly consumption, which were expressed through exterior appearance and initially the foyer. Multiplexes communicate in specific ways with their potential users, who in turn attribute specific meanings to them. Though *The Point*, in Milton Keynes, was a radical structure, the multiplexes built subsequently, with very few exceptions, were essentially big, rectangular metal or brick sheds: the epitome of Venturi, Brown and Izenour’s (1977) ‘Ducks’ and ‘Decorated Sheds’, in which ornament was only present on the façade, signifying the iconography of the building as a cinema. Their position alongside shopping centres and on sites adjacent to motorways and major roads meant that multiplexes were viewed and approached from a distance. The iconography of the buildings was expressed in terms of logos, glitzy designs of steel, glass and coloured brick, and bright lighting. Aesthetically, the multiplex promised a place of entertainment that was in tune

with its contents - namely the glamour and excitement of the feature film and specifically, the Hollywood feature film.

Building on the arguments advanced in ‘Spoilt for Choice?’ (Hanson, 2000) an analogy could be made between the multiplex and the fast-food restaurant since both sites determined spatially the relationship between consumer and provider, and the ways consumers perceived the site of exchange. Consumption as a driver for new forms of design was an expression of the ways in which neo-liberalism had begun to exert a powerful economic, social, political and cultural influence in the 1980s and 1990s. Neo-liberalism determined not just the aesthetics of the new leisure spaces but also their location and operation, and these were explored further in ‘A “Glittering Landmark for a 21st Century Entertainment Centre”’ (Hanson, 2013a). The Point’s conception and the decision to build it in a new town were revealing of a whole series of strategies and initiatives designed to promote the town as a site of leisure, whilst the radical design of the complex – by innovative architects Building Design Partnership and designer Neil Tibbatts – was both a dramatic statement by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation and a bold departure from previous cinema aesthetics.

The Point set the template for subsequent multiplex developments, especially in the first decade, when there were a series of building waves that saw over 80 complexes opened in Britain. *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) sets the architecture and design of the multiplex in the context of a series of phases such as this initial decade. Here the planning regulations were focussed on out-of-town development and greenfield sites which meant that large, single storey

buildings could open surrounding by substantial free parking. This orthodoxy was challenged subsequently though by both the restrictions placed on out-of-town, greenfield developments and the desire for urban regeneration, and the development of “brownfield” sites (see above). This was a theme developed in ‘From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre: Multiplexes in Britain from the 1990s’, (Hanson, 2013b) and ‘De « Green field » à « Brown field »: le mouvement des multiplexes dans le centre urbain’ (Hanson, 2013c) (see 3.8 below), in which the architecture and design of the multiplex was considered in the context of the city and town centre. Moreover, in utilising examples of city centre developments in places like Leicester and Manchester, both chapters focussed on the ways in which shopping and leisure developments were redefining the urban centre (especially what one might call “cities moving indoors”) and the extent to which prestige developments, incorporating cinemas, might regenerate certain parts of the urban core. In both chapters, the architecture and design of the multiplex were increasingly determined by the use of restricted space or “footprint”, as in the Leicester’s twelve-screen, four-storey Showcase Cinema de Lux, built in a new shopping complex called Highcross.

3.5 The multiplex audience

Underlying much of my early work was the question of the extent to which the advent of multiplex cinema accounted for the increase in overall attendance and how this increase was stratified according to age. This is the next contribution to knowledge. As previously outlined, since the number of multiplexes increased from 1985 onwards so did the number of cinema admissions, which rose steadily to reach a peak of 175.9 million in 2002 and though they fluctuated thereafter,

admissions stood at 165.5 million in 2013 (BFI, 2014:11). It is tempting to think that the virtual collapse in cinema-going was characterised by a steady decline, however this was not the case. In 1954 there were still more than 1.27 billion admissions per year, signifying that the cinema remained an important form of entertainment. However, the fact remains that when I collated the various data for admissions it was clear that there were periodic and sudden drops, with the period after 1954 a case in point, as the audience had declined by more than half to 500 million by 1960. Thereafter, the rate of decline steepened and accelerated so that by 1970 admissions had more than halved again to 193 million and would halve again to 101 million by 1980 and again to 54 million in 1984.

In 1983 the Cinema Advertising Association (CAA) initiated the *Cinema and Video Industry Audience Research (CAVIAR)* survey into film viewing in Britain. In 1984, they reported that 38 per cent of the population, aged seven or over claimed to go the cinema at least once a year but only five per cent were deemed to be 'regular cinemagoers' (those going once a month or more) (CAA, 1984). Ten years later the numbers had risen to 75 and 15 per cent respectively (CAA, 1996) In 1984 there had been no multiplexes but by 1995 there were 82. The general trend therefore, has been one of increased attendance and though the general profile of Britain's cinema audience has undergone some changes I would contend that not all were in line with broader demographic ones. If one considered the broad range of statistical data, in 1984 the cinema's most frequent cinemagoers were 7-14 year olds followed by 15-34 year olds. By 1996, the picture was still the same. In 2013 the core audience for the cinema – people aged 34 and under – has remained the same as that of earlier periods of cinema-going. To a large extent

this reflects Hollywood's predilection for films aimed at a younger audience, and the emphasis on "blockbusters", which were, I argued, intimately related to the development and continued success of multiplex. However, the most significant shift in attendance has been amongst over-35s, who witnessed considerable growth after the opening of the multiplex, albeit from a low point. In 1984 only 21 per cent of over-35s 'ever visited the cinema', however this increased annually so that by 1996 it had more than doubled to 58 per cent and by 2002 it was 74 per cent, where it more or less stabilised (see Dyja, 2003:40). Though initially positioning themselves as places of family entertainment, I argued that by the 1990s the exhibition industry, and the major multiplex chains in particular, had begun to see the older audience as the next target. In 1991 the BFI (1991:39) reported that multiplexes were successfully appealing to over-35s, who made up 27 per cent of the multiplex audience as opposed to 19 per cent at ordinary cinemas. This might have been due in part to the dominance of children's films at the box office, as many of this group would have been accompanied by adults, especially given the difficulties in getting to out-of-town sites on public transport.

Many multiplex owners felt that the over-45s were the next significant growth sector, especially since there was a feeling that having regained their leisure time and disposable income due to their children leaving home, the multiplex would reveal itself as a significant attraction. It is worth noting that this group would have been cinema's most enthusiastic attendees in the pre-multiplex era, especially as the multiplex was establishing itself in the first fifteen years after 1985. In 2013 the over-35s constitute an important demographic now for cinemas accounting for 34 per cent of total admissions (BFI, 2014). This is an area of

interest that I am currently considering in relation to the reopening of cinemas and development of new sites in Britain's smaller towns such as Melton Mowbray, in rural Leicestershire (see 3.8 below).

In 'Spoilt for Choice?' (Hanson, 2000) and *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) I argued that it was the spatial and geographical aspects of the multiplex that were instrumental in drawing people back to the cinema, not least because the films that dominated the multiplexes' screens were largely the same kinds of Hollywood studio features that had dominated Britain's screens prior to 1985. As a US phenomenon the multiplex had been shown to be successful in its techniques and approaches to providing the facilities for exhibiting films in ways that were seen as both new and innovatory. Despite this, the principle has remained the same: people sat in a darkened room and watched images projected onto a screen. Therefore, in order to encourage audiences to come, multiplexes had to market cinema-going as an "event" and themselves as the best place in which to watch a film. With the multiplex came a whole host of subsidiaries like restaurants, bars and new forms of food concessions, which were seen as placing the cinema as central to a whole night out. 'From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre: Multiplexes in Britain from the 1990s', (Hanson, 2013b) argues for the continued hegemony of the multiplex, especially in the ways in which it has redefined going to the cinema as an urban experience once more, seeking to attract the increasing number of people who being encouraged to move back into the city and town centre to live.

In the period since the first multiplex opened we have witnessed a dramatic change in the fortunes of many of Britain's towns and cities, not least in terms of population shifts. The perceived importance of encouraging residential development reflected a decades-long trend of depopulation in Britain's major city centres. A report by the Urban Task Force (2005:2) noted that in 1990 'there were 90 people living in the heart of Manchester, today there are 25,000 residents'. If one considers the 2011 UK census it is possible to see a 70 per cent increase in the population of Leicester's central ward. It is also worth noting the increase in those aged between 15-29 living in Leicester's centre compared to the previous census in 2001. This cannot altogether be accounted for by increases in students at Leicester's two universities for instance, especially as De Montfort's accommodation lies predominantly in a neighbouring ward. In any event the number of students in the city centre is a significant factor in city regeneration. An increase in town and city centre housing (mainly apartments) is largely a planning and developer-led phenomenon.

In arguing for the primacy of the multiplex I have sought to avoid concluding that they amount to a benign force, after all by 2013 three companies effectively controlled the multiplex market in Britain – Odeon (who merged with UCI), Cineworld and Vue (who purchased Warner Bros' sites) – and they accounted for 64 per cent of screens and took some 72 per cent of the annual total box-office, which was £1.17 billion in 2013 (BFI, 2014:66). In *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) I argued that the oft-repeated claim in the early days by the multiplex owners that they would widen their audience by programming so-called 'arthouse' films (e.g. 'critically acclaimed' foreign and English language, and non-

mainstream films) was largely disingenuous. In part this was because independent distributors were only able to make a limited number of prints available, but also because these films had established audiences at specialist independent and grant-aided cinemas, especially the BFI's Regional Film Theatres. Indeed, it seemed that, paradoxically, the failure by multiplex owners to establish an audience for arthouse films, or what were increasingly referred to as "specialised film", benefitted these cinemas. What was evident though was that this form of cinema was overwhelmingly a metropolitan one, catering for a largely middle-class audience.

3.6 Digital cinema

The parting shots in *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) heralded the advent of digital cinema and its potential as a disruptive technology. In addition, it was trumpeted as key to the efforts to widen cinema culture, via greater access to non-mainstream and specialised film, and the cinema audience for it. My subsequent consideration of this new form of exhibition, with its concomitant impact upon distribution, is a significant contribution to knowledge, and which formed the basis of a more sustained examination of developments in "Celluloid or Silicon?" Digital Exhibition and the Future of Specialised Film Exhibition' (Hanson, 2007b). Drawing upon a range of industry sources (esp. *Screen Digest* and *Screen International*), reports from the UK Film Council and interviews with those working in the exhibition industry; it was published in the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* under the heading 'Current Debates'. This research included the establishment of series of on-going relationships with key players in the market, including exhibitors (e.g. Odeon, Vue, Cineworld and Picturehouse), trade

bodies, (e.g. Cinema Exhibitors' Association), distributors, research companies (e.g. Dodona) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. the Independent Cinema Office, British Film Institute and the now defunct UK Film Council).

“‘Celluloid or Silicon?’” (Hanson, 2007b) had its origins in the research for a conference paper entitled ‘Subsidy or the Market? Digital Cinema and the Future of Film Exhibition’, *The Glow in their Eyes: Global Perspectives on Film Cultures, Film Exhibition and Cinema-going*, Universiteit Ghent in 2007. It was one of the first academic articles to deal with digital cinema exhibition and marked a significant contribution to what was at the time an emerging field of study. The article sought to problematize the prevailing assumption that digital cinema (d-cinema) was an example of technological progress. It did this by highlighting the tension between initiatives such as the Digital Screen Network, which attempted to promote the interests of non-mainstream film through state-subsidy, and the interests of the major Hollywood distributors, for whom digital cinema was potentially profitable even if the immediate future was uncertain. In an article on digitized exhibition and independent cinemas in Australia, Aveyard (2009:194) observed that:

[e]arlier scholarship concerned with digital exhibition has tended to represent the transition as a largely unproblematic and globally standardized proposition where existing cinematic power structures and markets would remain relatively unaltered, and where the technical presentation of films and the experience of cinema going for audiences are also not fundamentally changed...However, the limitation of such a position lies in its failure to consider the role of the national and the local in mediating and shaping global phenomena. One exception in this regard has been Stuart Hanson's work on digital cinema and specialized film exhibition in the United Kingdom (Hanson 2007b).

The publication of “Celluloid or Silicon?” along with *From silent screen to multi-screen* (Hanson, 2007a) brought me to the attention of Paul McDonald, the author of *Video and DVD Industries* (2007) and a well respected academic, who suggested that we collaborate on an AHRC research bid examining the development of digital cinema in Britain. The bid, submitted in 2009 and entitled *The End of Celluloid: The Digitization of Cinema Exhibition in Britain*, sought to critically evaluate how d-cinema was reshaping the commercial and cultural interface of film exhibition in Britain. It had proposed to examine the conversion to d-cinema in Britain across five areas of enquiry: the structure and operations of the digital cinema business in Britain; the aims and objectives of the UK Film Council’s DSN initiative; the industrial consequences of d-cinema conversion for film exhibition; the ways in which d-screens are enabling the presentation of new forms of entertainment; and how developments in the US influence the process of conversion in the Britain.

Preparation for the bid and the research undertaken (which involved a series of interviews with key commercial and statutory organisations including: the UK Film Council; Cinema Exhibitors Association; Vue, Curzon and Odeon cinemas and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)) formed the basis for a joint paper entitled ‘D-cinema in Britain: The UK Film Council and the Digital Screen Network’ at a conference organised by Janet Wasko at the University of Oregon entitled *What is Film? Change & Continuity in the 21st Century*. Though ultimately unsuccessful (it received a rating of 4) the AHRC bid enabled myself and Paul McDonald to approach Nigel Culkin from the University of

Hertfordshire and Martin Barker from UEA with a view to submitting a new joint bid to the AHRC, to consider contemporary developments in digital cinema in Britain. Entitled *Cinematic Futures: Prospects for Cinema in the Digital Age* and submitted in May 2014, the bid considers the ways in which digital projection technology (d-cinema) will change the identity and purpose of the cinema as a venue for public entertainment and how d-cinema transforms the culture and commerce of theatrical film exhibition. To investigate these core questions, the project combines perspectives on cinema history, screen technologies, media audiences and management practice to advance insights into the content, technologies, consumption and business of d-cinema. At the time of writing we were awaiting a response from the AHRC.

3.7 Britain's first multiplex: The Point in Milton Keynes

Upon the announcement of its proposed demolition, I returned to the subject of The Point in 'A "Glittering Landmark for a 21st Century Entertainment Centre"' (Hanson, 2013a), which is the first detailed history and drew upon archive work at the Milton Keynes Discovery Centre – which incidentally, had no coherent history of the complex at all. That this article was an important contribution to knowledge is evidenced by the fact that even the two significant histories of Milton Keynes (Clapson, 2004 and Bendixson and Platt, 1992) go into little detail about The Point. In accepting the article for publication the editor of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, James Chapman, confirmed in an email (7 January 2013) that it had been accepted for publication 'without revision...which is rare for the HJFRT'. According to Chapman the reader considered it 'an illuminating and original piece of research that succeeds in applying an

appropriately historical and contextual perspective to a very recent piece of cinema history’ and commended ‘the valuable detail of the case study, while not losing sight of the wider context of the history of cinema exhibition and cinemagoing in Britain.’

The research in preparation for this article resulted in September 2012 in a contribution to an application to English Heritage by the Cinema Theatre Association, for the inclusion of the building in the statutory list of buildings of special historic and architectural interest (Branscombe, 2012). The application utilised what was at the time some of my unpublished research and I was invited to comment on the initial consultation report (English Heritage, 2013). I made a series of observations in support of the application including:

- The pattern of multiplex development was bound up with the shopping centre, with The Point’s position adjacent to Milton Keynes’ shopping centre on Midsummer Boulevard (itself listed) elegantly exemplifying this relationship. The Point is a structure that defines Milton Keynes and emerged at a time when that city sought to create something that would become a recognisable symbol of its progressive and innovative spirit.
- The Point’s stepped Ziggurat design – the work of two seminally important companies – Building Design Partnership and Tibbatts Associates – is a bold and radical design, exemplifying the turn in architecture from modernism to post-modernism. The Ziggurat’s position as the frontage to the low-rise multiplex cinema behind is an example of symbolism in post-modern architecture. This is expressed in the steel structure’s allegorical reference to the Bass trademark and use of light, specifying the building as a centre of night-time entertainment. The latter also emphasizes The Point’s historical link with the super-cinema developments of the 1930s. The Point’s importance is manifest when one considers that few if any of the 270 multiplex developments since have been as adventurous or distinctive.

3.8 The re-emergence of urban-based cinema

Since the late 1990s the focus of cultural and economic policy has shifted from out-of-town to the town centre, with a concomitant shift in planning legislation. The first periods of accelerated growth in multiplex development – 1988-99 – coincided with a relaxed planning environment, in which the urban centre was seen as less attractive to investors and developers than the area around the urban core. In retrospect, the key moment in the transition in both the fortunes of the urban centre and the cinema were the opening of two enormous complexes – the Trafford Centre, near Manchester and Bluewater, off the M25 motorway in Kent, in 1998 and 1999 retrospectively. These marked the effective end of the giant, out-of-town shopping centre in favour of town and city centre developments, though the emphasis was still determinedly on the mixed shopping/leisure development, in which the multiplex was an important element.

Therefore, in recent work I have sought a new direction for my research around cinema developments in relation to planning and cultural policy especially with respect to urban regeneration and the re-emergence of the town and city centre as a focus for ‘sustainable development’. This forms the final contribution to knowledge in my range of publications. ‘From out-of-town to the edge and back to the centre: Multiplexes in Britain from the 1990s’, (Hanson, 2013b) and ‘De « Green field » à « Brown field »: le mouvement des multiplexes dans le centre urbain’ (Hanson, 2013c) examine the extent to which the development of the multiplex marked first a break in cinema’s relationship with the city centre, only for it to be re-established in the first years of the twenty-first century. These

publications also consider the complex interplay between planning, the market, and the resurgence of the urban centre as the focus, both in Britain generally and more specifically via reference to the city of Leicester as a case study. The interest in the re-location of cinema from out-of-town to town centre came out of an invited paper entitled ‘From Greenfield to Brownfield: The Movement of the Multiplex into the Urban Centre’, given at *Les salles de cinéma en Europe: enjeux, défis et perspectives*, organized by the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (FMSH), Institut de recherche sur le cinéma et l’audiovisuel (IRCAV), and the Institut National pour l’Histoire de l’Art, Paris, in 2011.

My primary research interests remain the multiplex cinema and in particular the spatial relocation of the multiplex from the periphery of Britain’s towns and cities back to the centre and the emergence of new forms of cinema – traditional and non-multiplex. In Britain over the last three years some 53 new cinemas have opened, of which 43 were non-multiplexes (‘traditional and mixed-use sites’) (BFI, 2013:117). According to Dodona Research (2013) 2012 was the first year since 1984 (prior to opening of The Point) when the number of traditional screens increased more than the number of multiplex screens. A look at the average number of screens per site reveals that although the overwhelming majority of Britain’s traditional cinemas are in town and city centres (four screens per site), the multiplex cinema is still located predominantly outside the urban centre (eight screens per site). Nevertheless, the year-on-year increase in city and town centre cinemas between 2010-13 suggests that changes to planning laws in the past fifteen years and a greater stress on town and city centre regeneration *has* seen the re-emergence of the cinema as a key feature of the urban landscape. This is a

significant contribution to the current debates regarding the role of cinema in urban regeneration, especially given the plethora of proposed town-centre based developments across Britain.

Much of this development is taking place in Britain's smaller towns rather than its large metropolitan centres and reflects a national trend as the number of screens in city centre or edge of centre cinemas increased by over twenty per cent between 2001 and 2004 (UKFC, 2004:40). In Newquay in Cornwall, a town with a population of approximately 27,000, the four-screen Lighthouse Cinema opened in May 2011. In Thurso in Scotland (population approximately 7,900) the two-screen Thurso Cinema was opened in July 2012, in the previously closed All Star Factory site, after a vigorous public campaign. In Whitstable in Kent (population approximately 32,000) the single-screen Whitstable Electric Theatre opened in August 2011. In Northampton (population approximately 212,000) the Errol Flynn Filmhouse opened in June 2013, even though the town has two multiplexes on the periphery. In Knutsford, Cheshire the London-based independent chain Curzon opened their first cinema outside London, in the former Studio Cinema, in February 2013. This was followed by the opening of the two-screen Curzon in the small Yorkshire town of Ripon in October 2013, some 31 years after the previous cinema in the town closed.

Across Britain many local councils are undertaking scoping studies and proposing action plans for their town centres, most of which stress the importance of developing mixed retail and leisure developments in which the multiplex is an anchor tenant. These towns include Aldershot (seven-screen Cineworld), Walsall

(nine-screen Vue), Trowbridge (seven-screen Odeon) and Leigh (seven-screen Cineworld) all opened or due to open between 2011-14. Moreover, one can expect this growth in new openings to continue in the foreseeable future. Lots of towns have definite plans to build new cinemas as part of new retail and leisure developments, or construction has started, including West Bromwich, Orpington, Grantham, Wilmslow, Selby, Swindon and Telford. In the centre of Cramlington, a small town in Northumberland, a 1,300-seat, nine-screen Vue multiplex opened in 2013. It was the first of a series of similar developments in other towns in the North-East of England, such as Gateshead, Bishop Auckland and Darlington. All were spurred on in part because of the desire to regenerate what are former industrial towns and boost employment. It is an area of work that is on-going, with a particular focus upon developments in the Northamptonshire town of Corby, which is currently the site of two proposed new multiplexes in the town centre and in the Leicestershire market town of Melton Mowbray where a former cinema, the Regal, has been reopened. These and other developments have informed a recently written chapter for a reader for Palgrave Macmillan entitled *Cinema beyond the City: Filmgoing in Small-Town and Rural Europe*, edited by Judith Thissen and Clemons Zimmermann, itself based upon an invited paper entitled “‘Town centres first’: the relocation of the cinema from out of town to the town centre’, which was delivered at the *International Workshop on Comparative Cinema History 2013 - The Lure of the City: Cinema Culture in Small-Towns and Rural Communities in Europe*, Universität des Saarlandes, Germany, 2013.

4. CONCLUSION

The publications submitted chart the history of cinema exhibition in Britain from the end of the nineteenth to the first years of the twenty-first century – from the birth of cinema as a publicly exhibited medium to the virtual demise of celluloid and its replacement by digital exhibition. Together they constitute a sustained research effort as each of the works have built upon and developed the one that preceded it. The primary focus and coherent field of research has been on developments in cinema exhibition over the past 50 years and in particular the history of the multiplex cinema in Britain, the emergence of digital cinema technologies and the relationship between urban development and the cinema. Throughout, I have sought firmly to avoid an over-deterministic focus on simply technology or cinemas, rather the research has sought to place the development of cinema in a broad social, economic, cultural and political context.

In the first instance, I would contend that it is not possible to analyse the development of the multiplex in Britain without recognising that the story of the multiplex cinema begins in the USA in the 1960s. Implicit in this analysis is a recognition of the domination of US media multi-nationals and Hollywood cinema, and the development of the multiplex cinema as symbolic of the extension and maintenance of the USA's cultural and economic power. Here I would argue that there are explicit parallels between the context for development of the multiplex in the USA – suburbanisation, shopping malls and reliance on the motorcar – and developments in Britain in the 1980s in particular.

I would argue that the origins of the multiplex lay in the decline of cinema-going as a public entertainment from the late 1950s, which as we have seen, accelerated from the late 1960s onwards. Though the exhibition industry was vocal in its identification of television as the main culprit the reasons for the decline are multifarious, encompassing not just television but changing leisure patterns, demographic changes and population movement, the growth of consumer culture, and new technologies like home-video and satellite. If one analyses the data available it is true to say the number of people going to the cinema has increased almost every year since 1984, that the number of multiplex visits is significantly higher than the proportion of multiplex screens and the multiplex sector accounts for a disproportionately large percentage of total box-office. Therefore, if one concludes that the annual increases in attendance are accounted for by the advent of the multiplex, then the key question is *why* were multiplexes so popular with audiences when cinema had been declining prior to their inception. The answer I argue is not about films, since the kinds that dominated Britain's screens before the multiplex were essentially the same big-budget, Hollywood blockbusters, whilst the advent of the VCR shifted the focus for film viewing from the public into the private sphere.

Any analysis of the development of the multiplex cinema, must recognise that this decline in cinema-going characterised a particular phase of capitalism, which we might characterise as the demise of Fordism and the relative importance of manufacturing for large numbers of settled communities. Implicit in this decline was the corresponding decline of many of Britain's towns and cities and the cinemas therein. Therefore, it was the way in which the multiplex re-established

cinema as a site for the consumption of films, as the multiplex companies set about marketing the cinema as not only the best place to see a film (in an echo of 1985's *British Film Year*) but as a place to which people wished to go. Multiplex companies did this by ensuring that their cinemas: took account of new trends in retailing and leisure, by locating them amidst other kinds of attractions both before and after the film had been viewed; reflected the lifestyles of consumers, such as multiple show times and new kinds of concessions; had improved sight lines, sound and picture quality; could be booked by credit card on the telephone or later online; and were accessible by car and with lots of free parking.

Thus, I have sought to consider the development of the multiplex cinema as part of a wider narrative about the re-positioning of cinema-going as a collective, public form of visual entertainment, in the 1980s and 1990s, in the context of some dramatic changes in the transient nature of capitalism. Here the market began to be seen as a way of dealing with complex and seemingly insoluble problems to do with an increasingly post-industrial Britain. Specifically, the key imperative in the development of multiplex cinemas in Britain was the impact of neo-liberal economic policy promulgated by successive Conservative governments and in particular attempts to mitigate the effects of de-industrialisation, especially in the regions.

My research has led me to the principal conclusion that the key to understanding the evolution of the multiplex cinema is to pay particular attention to urban planning as inherently ideological, shifting and changing in line with broader political, economic and social considerations. So, the corollary of relaxed

planning restrictions in the 1980s was the development of large out-of-town shopping centres on the edge of many of Britain's conurbations. There seems no doubt that there exists a synergistic relationship between the multiplex and these centres, which were important in the spread of these new cinemas in Britain. In the period from the early 1990s onwards there was a growing anxiety about the impact of out-of-town developments on Britain's urban centres, which found expression in new planning guidelines emphasising the importance of the urban core rather than the edge. What is significant is that in the refocusing on the urban core it is still both shopping and the cinema that are perceived as integral to urban regeneration.

Throughout the history of cinema exhibition the form and function of buildings have both reflected *and* challenged broader contemporary, aesthetic and cultural sensibilities: from the first purpose-built cinemas from 1910 onwards, through the spectacular modernist picture palaces of the 1930s, the utilitarian and austere buildings of the 1960s, often buried under office developments, and finally to the brightly lit postmodernist "sheds" of the 1980s. I contend that the aesthetics of the multiplex reflect the contemporary importance of consumption as both the prime determinant of the economy but also of personal identity. This has found expression in the notion of the consumer society, in which consumer lifestyle was also an integral feature of one's conception of the "self" – assumed to determine consumers' motives, feelings and beliefs (see Odih, 2007). In the same way that the first US multiplexes (often referred to as "cookie cutter theaters") reflected the functionalist style of the concrete mall, the first wave of multiplexes that emerged in Britain still reflected the functionalism of the shopping centre though often

masked by a range of postmodernist flourishes. Therefore, I would argue that to fully understand the diffusion of the multiplex one must accept that the design of the multiplex echoed the aesthetics and spatial features of other sites of consumption such as leisure centres, bowling alleys and fast-food restaurants, to which people were increasingly drawn.

Though the out-of-town shopping complex is an important feature of leisure and consumption patterns in Britain in the twenty-first century, I have delineated a series of shifts in the relative position of the periphery and the core, with the city and town centre once more the focus for development. However, this further supports the contention that consumption is still the ideological mantra for urban development, with Britain's new cinemas increasingly relocated to the city, as part of the new leisure economy. Just as the city centre declined in relative importance as a place of leisure and entertainment in the late 1970s, precipitating a commercial flight to the edges, so it is now seen as undergoing a "renaissance". In the 1930s, especially with the development of the suburbs, the city centre was a spectacular attraction for visitors, offering new kinds of spaces and entertainments (see Chaney, 1996). In 2013 the urban centre is increasingly the focus of a series of civic initiatives aimed at regeneration, predicated upon the city once again as spectacular. Consumption is the key and here too the new multiplex cinema is reflecting the aesthetics of the shopping centre or the "quarter".

To argue for the importance of the multiplex in the reinvigoration of cinema attendance is not, however, to deny that they constitute a powerful economic and cultural force in cinema exhibition that might not be seen as wholly positive.

Their presence in the cinema landscape has to be constantly qualified. In 1984 cinema exhibition was terminally ill and yet notwithstanding some fluctuation in attendance (usually after spikes associated with certain blockbuster films such as *Avatar* in 2009 or *Skyfall* in 2012) the year-on-year increase in the number of multiplexes has been echoed in a rise in admissions. They fatally undermined the previous exhibition duopoly, which for many was restricting and constricting cinema, though the story of the multiplex is one of concentration of ownership. They have trumpeted “choice” yet the evidence is homogeneity in terms of films shown with a concomitant reliance on films from the major Hollywood studios and distributors. But then this monopolisation of British screens by Hollywood did not begin in 1985: it follows a developing trend over the period since the period after the First World War.

Though multiplexes dominate exhibition in terms of box-office and admissions, there is no doubt that many towns and cities in Britain have thriving independent cinemas (e.g. Broadway in Nottingham, the Midland Arts Centre in Birmingham and The Cornerhouse in Manchester) and small regional chains (e.g. Merlin Cinemas, Hollywood Cinemas, Northern Morris and Scott Cinemas), many of which show non-mainstream films to sustainable audiences. Multiplexes have revolutionised, perhaps modernised, the business of cinema management, with greater emphasis on customer service, comfort and convenience. However their business and employment practices have relied to a great degree on low-paid, de-skilled and increasingly non-unionised staff. In an interview I conducted in 2008 with Roland Jones, the IT Director of Vue Cinemas, he argued that it was possible to run the projection rooms of all of their cinemas equipped with digital

projection equipment, from the headquarters in London. He would not be drawn at that point on whether it was probable.

So, we arrive at the closing credits with the realisation that cinema remains an important public entertainment whose immediate future at least, looks healthy. Indeed, as I have argued, the re-emergence of cinema in the middle of Britain's towns and cities suggests a continuing and important place for it in the cultural life of these places. This trend is a key focus for my research in the foreseeable future, along with the continuing desire to undertake a more complete history of the multiplex cinema in Britain and Europe. It is a story not yet told satisfactorily.

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